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**NARRATIVE-DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF FATHERLY  
SUICIDE**

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## **NARRATIVE-DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF FATHERLY SUICIDE**

In this article we are interested in narratives-stories of sons and daughters about their fathers who completed suicide. The data come from ten interviews with survivors of suicidal death of their fathers. Taking a constructionist view of discourse, we aim to analyse sons' and daughters' narratives in the context of two conflicting discourses of (positive) fatherhood and (negative) suicide. We shall show how they use the discursive strategies of distancing in the narratives about fathers' suicide as a means of coping with the two conflicting discourses. And so, first, they avoid labelling the act as suicide, second, they avoid direct reference to the fact that it was their father who completed the act, third, they dilute the father's responsibility for the act.

Keywords: suicide survivors; parental suicide; father; masculinity; mental health; discourse analysis

## Background

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) over 800,000 people complete<sup>1</sup> suicide every year (1,8% of total mortality) and it is estimated that 1.5 million of people will die by suicide in 2020. Poland ranks 4<sup>th</sup> highest European country for male suicide (16<sup>th</sup> of 172 countries all over the world). The suicide rate among men in Poland is 68% higher than the average rate in European Union countries (Wojtyniak, Goryński and Moskaiewicz, 2012). The male/female ratio of suicides is approximately 7,5:1 and it is on the rise. Potential fathers, men aged 25-65 complete well over half of all suicides. Each of these suicide deaths will affect at least six (Shneidman, 1969) to ten (Jordan and McMenamy, 2004) or even twenty people (Berman, 2011). A significant part of those affected are children survivors of parental suicide deaths. In our article we aim to discuss their discursively constructed perceptions of their deceased fathers.

Furthermore, suicide is one of the most stigmatising acts and although there is evidence that today's stigma is subtler (Feigelman et al., 2009), people who died by suicide are still rated as more blameworthy, weak, cowardly, selfish and sinful than those who died, for example, through cancer (Sand et al., 2013). In consequence, those who survive suicide death of a loved one not only have to cope with loss of her/him, but also may have to face negative attitude and comments about the deceased. As Feigelman, Gorman and Jordan (2009) argue such stigmatization of suicidal death can exacerbate survivors' grief difficulties and mental health problems.

Now, we see fatherhood in terms of ideology, social expectations of what it means to be a father (Galasiński, 2013) and we approach fatherhood following Zoja (2001), who points out that the most basic and enduring aspect of fatherhood is a paradox of opposing roles a father has. The father's 'success' is measured on the one

hand by his interaction with the child, but also, crucially, by how he interacts with the society. To make things more complicated, Zoja adds that the children themselves want the father to succeed in the world, they want him to be strong and victorious. And this is the imagery and expectation of what Burgess (1997) calls the archetypal father: the king, the father in heaven, a figure that is imbued with authority and power.

But the ideological landscape of fatherhood gets more complicated. Unprecedented levels of father absence from families (Coltrane, 2004; also Dermott, 2008) are coupled with more and more pressure for 'new fatherhood', an emotional involvement with the child (O'Brien, 2005). The types of fatherhood that are readily identified in research seem to be more and more fuzzy, while researchers talk about fatherhoods and their different configurations (Miller, 2011), getting away from a unified model of masculinity and/or fatherhood (Vuori, 2009).

Absent, gay, adoptive, social, biological or non-resident (Miller, 2011) or new, hands-on, enlightened, modern, third-stage (Dienhart, 1998) fatherhoods become discursive categories which are filled with context-bound narrative and practice configurations. The ideological turmoil, coupled with the aforementioned paradoxes, makes fatherhood precarious and insecure, as the father, who gives more and more, matters less and less (Zoja, 2001). However, ~~importantly~~ importantly, despite this precariousness, and yet, it is still the strong provider role which is one of the most enduring and still dominant roles the society has for the father (Featherstone, 2009; Greaves et al., 2010; O'Brien et al., 2007).

The two sets of literature are indicative of a conflict introduced by fatherly suicide. To put it simply, the ~~highly~~ highly stigmatising act of suicide cannot be written into the still ~~dominant~~ dominant social metanarrative of strong fatherhood. Socially, the two discourses must result in a conflict. In this paper we ~~explore~~ explore

this conflict suggesting that it is resolved by strategies of discursive distancing from three elements of the the process of completing suicide. We focus on the lexical backgrounding of the act, the ambiguation of agentivity and the agent of the act.

## **Aims and Methodology**

As we have just indicated, We-we approached our data with the evidence-based the following assumption thatn. The the positivity and strength of the provider role and negativity and implied weakness of those who complete suicide potentially lead to a conflict. To put it simply: how can a strong father complete such a cowardly act? And so in this article we are interested in narratives-stories of (adult) children who lost their fathers through suicide. We are particularly concerned with this apparent conflict between narratives of fatherhood and suicide, as well as means of resolving it in the stories of the children of the suicides. That is to say, we are interested in how our informants discursively cope with on the one hand cultural metanarratives of fatherhood positioning it in terms of strength, providing, and care, and other hand social negativity of suicide.

The social scientific research on parental loss has so far focused on psychological experiences and consequences of loss. Researchers focused on emotional well-being of children bereaved by parental suicide, indicating that they experience more anxiety, fear, anger or shame than peers bereaved by nonsuicidal death of parents (Mitchell et al., 2006, Pfeffer et al., 2000; Pfeffer et al., 2002; Ratnarajah & Schofield, 2008). They are also reported to be at greater risk of

psychiatric problems (especially major depressive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder), future suicide attempts and even death by suicide (Brent and Mann, 2005; Cerel et al., 2008; Cerel and Roberts, 2005; Hung and Rabin, 2009; Sorensen et al., 2009). Alternatively, researchers focused on the impact upon social relations of bereaved children, suggesting suicide survivors can feel more isolated and stigmatized than others bereaved and in fact they can be perceived more negatively than survivors of other types of loss (Allen et al., 1993; Jordan, 2001; Range, 1998) and in particular psychologically disturbed, less likeable, more ashamed and in need of professional mental health help.

In contrast to these studies, our paper focuses on discursive constructions of fatherly suicide and in particular on discursive ‘resolution’ to the ideological conflict between fatherhood and suicide. This is an unexplored topic hitherto. We are not aware of any such previous research.

Methodologically, our analysis is rooted in ~~the~~-constructionist views of discourse and is a version of Critical Discourse Analysis (Barker and Galasiński, 2001; Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993). We assume that social reality is constructed through and within language and that every language use designed to represent reality necessarily entails decisions as to which aspects of that reality to include, as well as decisions as to how to arrange them. Each of these selections carries its share of implicit assumptions, so that the reality represented is ideologically constructed (Hodge and Kress, 1993). It is also through discourse (i.e. practices of representation) that language users constitute social realities: their knowledge of social situations, the roles they play, their identities and relations with other social groups (van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999). No text, spoken or written, represents reality in a neutral or objective way, representation is never of reality ‘as it really is’, rather reality is

always viewed through the tinted lens of ideological assumptions (Barker and Galasiński, 2001; Fairclough, 1992).

We ~~adopt~~ situate our analyses with the field of Critical Discourse Studies (Krzyszowski and Forchtner, 2016) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as we are primarily interested in practices of representation in the discourses they use. We see discourse analysis ~~In contrast to other strands of discourse analysis (such as Conversation Analysis or narrative analysis), CDA is~~ capable of accounting not only for lexical choices but also for grammatical forms, as well as larger syntactic and textual patterns, thereby becoming a tool in understanding how people construct their experience and their identities, and relate them to the social reality in which they live. In such a way we shall be able to demonstrate how continuing bonds with the deceased are constructed in the accounts of their relatives.

We focus here upon the form of stretches of discourse identified for analysis (see below), with an interest both in the semantics and syntax of an utterance, as well as the functions of what is said within the local context. The analysis draws upon Halliday's functional linguistics where the lexico-grammatical form of utterances is foregrounded as a resource for constructing meaning (Halliday, 1994: 15). Here we explore the ideational function of what the informants said, i.e. we are predominantly interested in how they represent extralinguistic reality. But we also focus on the content of what is said, relating it to the larger socio-institutional context in which it is used, using a hermeneutic-like interpretation of discourses in terms of the context in which they were submerged (see Titscher et al., 2000). In such a way we attempt to reach the ideological underpinnings of the participants' experiences.

~~Furthermore~~ Furthermore, situating our analyses in the critical strand of discourse analysis we also flag up an object of inquiry which has so far



received practically no attention both from the discourse analytic community and, more generally, from the social sciences. Our aim therefore is not only to give voice to a group of informants who have largely been ignored by research, but also show practices of dealing with the stigma and self-stigma carried by the suicide of their fathers.

## **The Study**

The article is based on ten interviews with adults who survived the suicidal death of their fathers. The criteria for inclusion were: (1) surviving the suicidal death of father, (2) at least two years since the suicidal death (3) being at least 18 years old, (4) self-reportedly able to cope with the interview (included in the consent procedure) 5) informed, written consent to participate in the study<sup>2</sup>. We excluded any participant who received psychiatric help due to the father's death. Informants who met the criteria were recruited consecutively.

We wanted the sample to be as diverse as possible both in terms of the age of the informants and the time that elapsed since the event. The sample consisted therefore of five women and five men aged between 20 and 50 years at the time of the study, with a mean of age of 38,4 (median=44), and the father's suicide occurred between 3,5 and 28 years earlier, with a mean of 17,8 years (median=17,4). Nine participants were married, one single. Eight participants had children.

The interviews were recorded between September 2010 and May 2011 in the south west of Poland. We used semi-structured interviews to explore: (1) the circumstances of the suicidal death of the father (2) consequences of the father's suicide (past and present) (3) life after the father's suicide (past and present) – coping

and bereavement. The mean duration of the recorded interviews was 32 minutes, ranging from 21 to 56 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

All personal and other information which could lead to revealing the identity of the informants was removed<sup>3</sup>. The analyses were based on the original Polish data. For the purpose of this article, the fragments we quote were translated into English. The translation is as close as possible to the original Polish version, aiming not only to render what was said, but also how it was said. This occasionally results in 'bad' or disjointed English.

### *Analysis*

Bearing in mind the two sets of literature, we were interested in the extent that the two conflicting discourses find their way into the stories of our informants. And indeed, our stories are full of what has been described as 'distancing' (Bavelas et al., 1990; Galasiński, 2004, 2008). We understand distancing as dissolution of the 'ownership' relationship between the speaking subject and the category of s/he refers to. For example, linguistically, it includes situations when the social actor is not rendered as the linguistic one, socially, when, say, an ill person is using strategies allowing them to avoid making a direct attribution of illness to their self. In the case of the data at hand distancing consist in non-direct references to various aspects of the father's suicide.

In order to systematise the discussion, we assumed that there are three crucial elements of suicide which can be distanced from. First, it is the 'nature' of the act, that is to say, the death of a person occurred through an act referred to as suicide.

Distancing would consist in avoidance of labelling the act in such a way, a suicide becomes something else. Second, a suicide is completed by a concrete person; in the data we have, the informants' fathers. Distancing in their stories would mean that they avoid direct reference to the fact that it was their father who completed the act. Finally, for an act to be considered suicide, it must be intended as such, the person must have wanted to complete it, it cannot, for example, be an accident. Distancing in this case would mean quite literally a dissolution of ownership between the person who completed suicide and the suicide itself.

We would like to stress here that in this article we are interested in the discourses (practices of representation) our informants drew on when they spoke to us. We want to discover what might be called a 'discourse of fatherly suicide', the ways in which the concept is made social through the process of narrating it. In such a way we set aside the issue of representativeness of the data. We are not trying to make a claim as to the extent our findings are representative of (Polish) children of suicides. Rather, we are interested in uncovering practices of discursive construction of fathers who completed suicide. And even though we cannot answer the question of how dominant these constructions are, the data we collected offer a first glimpse of the ways our informants and perhaps others in their situation cope with it.

In what follows, we start our discussion by setting the scene and briefly discussing how our informants talked about their fathers. We shall then juxtapose these stories with those of the suicide. We shall argue that the positivity of the stories of fathers cannot be squared with the negativity of suicide. This is indeed why, the stories of suicide are full of distancing, which we shall discuss in some detail.

## The Positive Father

We would like to set the context for the analysis below quoting three brief extracts from our corpus where interviewers asked our informants about their fathers. The stories we obtained were of unquestioned positivity of the father. Consider the following three extracts:

(1) interviewee 3, woman

MDI(Interviewer): and now, who is your dad for you, in retrospect?

ID(~~Daughter~~Interviewee): obviously he always was the most important person. at home, in our lives, in my life. for sure. I got married I have a husband I have kids I have someone to live for. well, but dad is dad he is always an authority.

(1) badany 3, kobieta

MD: a kim teraz z perspektywy czasu jest dla ciebie tato?

I: wiadomo no był zawsze najważniejszą osobą. w domu w: naszym życiu w moim życiu. wiadomo. ja wyszłam za mąż mam męża mam dzieci mam dla kogo żyć. no ale tato to tato to zawsze taki autorytet.

(2) interviewee 5, man

MDI: and now, who is your dad for you, in retrospect?

IS(~~Son~~): [...] practically he was everything for me.

(2) badany 5, mężczyzna

MD: a kim teraz z perspektywy czasu jest dla pana ojciec?

I: [...] on był dla mnie wszystkim praktycznie.

(3) interviewee 9, man

MDI: and now, who is your dad for you, in retrospect?

IS: he was an authority. he is and he will be.

(3) badany 9, mężczyzna

MD: a kim teraz tak z perspektywy czasu jest dla pana tato?

I: był autorytetem. jest i będzie.

The constructed commitment to the father and his positivity is quite striking – the father is referred to as an authority<sup>4</sup>, ‘everything’, the most important person. The positiveSuch references to the father are linguistically unmitigated and unqualified, rendering complete certainty of the speaker. The speaker in (1) casts this positivity as a social rule, with use of ‘~~obviously~~<sup>4</sup>obviously<sup>5</sup>’. Throughout the stories, the positive light in which fathers are rendered is unqualified. We present these three snippets as an empirical background to the data we discuss below. It seems that it is stories which construct fathers’ positivity which is unshakeable and they set the yardstick for other stories.

## **Distancing from Suicide**

In this section we present the stories of the father’s suicide. We focus on the strategies of distancing we found in our corpus. We first describe strategies in which the speakers make both the act and ‘doer’ ambiguous, and then we discuss the stories in which the agentivity is undermined.

### *Suicide?*

Consider first the following extract:

(4) interviewee 10, man

MD: and now, who is your dad for you, in retrospect?

IS: hm [sighs] it's an extraordinary figure for me, certainly. now it can be said that he has become a kind of a legend. it can be said a hero and it is not because of that event, but just by his life. and I personally really miss my dad. I would do a lot to get him back.

(4) badany 10, mężczyzna

MD: kim teraz już tak z perspektywy czasu jest dla Ciebie tato?

I: hm [wzdycha] to jest dla mnie to jest taka postać na pewno niezwykła. Teraz już można powiedzieć że stał się kimś w rodzaju jakiegoś takiego osoby legendy. osoby y: można powiedzieć bohatera pewnego nie przez to zdarzenie ale przez przez przez jego po prostu życiorys. i mi osobiście bardzo brakuje taty. dużo bym zrobił żebym mógł go odzyskać.

We wanted to showcase this extract, as it represents well the argument we are proposing here. This is another story which constructs the deceased father only in positive terms. But the story also contains a reference to the suicide and the reference is a very clear case of a distancing strategy. The speaker prefers to speak of 'that event', rather than of the suicide. In such a way, we think, the speaker is able to preserve the untarnished image of the father, with a life that does not contain the

negatively evaluated suicide. The distancing strategy allows the speaker to keep the positive image intact. Consider now:

(5) interviewee 9, man

IS: [...] I say again, my father was, he was the authority for me. he was, he is and he will be. I'd do anything not to let it happen, to avoid it. to reach in some way. talk. do anything so it would not have happened.

(5) badany 9, mężczyzna

I: [...] jeszcze raz mówię był dla mnie ojciec był dla mnie autorytetem. był jest i będzie. i zrobiłbym wszystko żeby tego żeby do tego nie dopuścić. żeby tego uniknąć. żeby w jakikolwiek sposób dotrzeć. porozmawiać. cokolwiek zrobić żeby do tego nie doszło.

(6) interviewee 6, woman

MDI: and now, who is your dad for you, in retrospect?

ID: he is the guardian angel who looks at me and who is always close to me in my heart, nothing has changed. I love him so much and now even more. I know that he didn't do it, because- certainly he didn't want to do it, he didn't want to hurt anyone. I realize that our psyche somehow also controlled him that he had did such a, because it, one needs to be more strong in order to take such a step.

(6) badany 6, kobieta

MD: a kim teraz z perspektywy czasu jest dla ciebie tato?

I: jest aniołem stróżem y który patrzy na mnie i który zawsze jest blisko mnie w moim sercu y: nic się nie zmieniło. kocham go tak samo nawet bardziej. wiem że y: nie zrobił to dlatego że na pewno nie chciał tego zrobić nie chciał nikogo skrzywdzić. y: zdaje sobie sprawę że nasza psychika gdzieś sterowała też nim że popełnił takie bo to jest to jest ogromne y: ktoś musi być bardziej silny żeby żeby zdecydować się na taki krok.

These are typical ways in which the father's suicide is not talked about. Informants use 'it' to refer to the act, as if it was completely clear what they talk about. Any further reference was unnecessary. Notably, the Polish original of (6) contains the word *popełnił* in the last sentence, which is ambivalent in the context. It can be both translated as 'did' (as we have) and as 'committed' (implying that the informant is speaking of suicide – we think this might be an overinterpretation). Quite interestingly, however, that speaker stops and does not finish the phrase, what her father did or committed is left unsaid. We think that this supports our argument.

Now, the reference to 'it' can also be seen in the one narrative in which the informant shares his uncertainty about his father's motivations:

(7) interviewee 5, man

IS: well, first there was fear. fear and fright. and then, there was an anger. T there was anger about why he did it, why he passed away, why he left<sup>s</sup> us. it was hard to explain to myself why he did it. why? did he not love us any more?

(7) badany 5, mężczyzna



I: no więc najpierw był strach. strach i przerażenie. a później była złość. była złość dlaczego on to zrobił dlaczego odszedł dlaczego nas zostawił. ciężko było wytłumaczyć to sobie dlaczego on to zrobił. dlaczego? czy już nas nie kochał?

Despite the fact that the story is not so positive (it is also not negative), the informant chooses not to refer to suicide, preferring to speak of the ambiguous 'it'. But there is another interesting aspect of this fragment. The speaker seems not to be able to ascribe clear 'directionality' of the act. That is to say, the speaker offers a very hesitant construction of who was the 'recipient' of the suicide. Even here, however, the linguistic constructions are safe, as if to protect his father. And so, while the informant asks why his father left the family or whether he loved them at all, when he refers to the 'it', the suicide, he shifts the direction of the act onto the father himself. By asking why he did 'it' to himself, the suicide itself seems to be about the father only, it is only the consequences that are experienced by those who stayed behind.

Now, we realise that there is a potential reservation here. Did the informants simply avoid repeating of the word 'suicide' perhaps for 'stylistic' reasons. In other words, while the context provides enough clues to what 'it' refers to, there is no need to use the same word repeatedly. We do not believe that this is the case. The distancing strategies can only be seen-found in those contexts in which the informants speak of the act and of their father. Moreover, this strategy must be seen in the context of other strategies. And so, as suicide is backgrounded, so are references to the father and his decisions to complete it. In other words, it would be difficult to see absence of direct references to the father as distancing and absence of those to the act as resulting from informants' stylistic sensitivities.

**Who did it?**

And so, our informants used strategies making the ‘doer’ ambiguous, as they avoided ascribing the suicide directly to their father. Consider the following extracts:

(8) interviewee 8, man

IS: [...] I try to understand him, because the guy was barely 45 years old when he committed a suicide, so he was only two years older than the age I am now.

(8) badany 8, mężczyzna

I: [...] ja staram się go zrozumieć bo facet był jak popełnił samobójstwo miał ledwie czterdzieści pięć lat także on z był wtedy tylko dwa lata starszy od tego wieku co ja jestem.

(9) interviewee 2, man

IS: [...] at 45 he lost his way out there. he was an educated guy. smart. maybe he was too sensitive. this is why it happened. he fell into alcoholism because of his work.

(9) badany 2, mężczyzna

I: [...] mając czterdzieści pięć lat gdzieś tam z/ po/ zagubił się. był wykształconym facetem. inteligentnym. może za bardzo wrażliwym. dlatego tak to się stało. w alkoholizm wpadł przez swoją pracę.

(10) interviewee 1, woman

ID: [...] others probably commit suicide just like in the case of my dad. when the illness catches you and you can't handle it and committing, doing it one definitely is not fully aware of his act and certainly it is dreadful, dreadful for the whole family, for the whole family, because that person who is no longer there, well, I hope that somehow he is simply better off, but for those who stay behind it's really hard.

(10) badany 1, kobieta

I: [...] inni no popełniają pewnie samobójstwo tak już tutaj w przypadku mojego taty. y: gdy dopada choroba i człowiek sobie nie może poradzić a a przede wszystkim popełnia robią/ robiąc to na pewno nie jest w pełni świadomy swojego czynu i na pewno jest to straszne jest to straszne dla całej rodziny dla całej rodziny bo ta osoba której już nie ma no to no mam nadzieję że tam sobie jakoś po prostu jest jej lepiej a tym którzy zostają jest naprawdę ciężko.

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In all three extracts the speakers shift the identity of the person who completed suicide from their father to a more general reference to a group of people their father belonged to. And so, in the case of extracts (8) and (9) the informants use the word 'guy' (Polish *facet*). There is a reservation to be made here, though. Polish does not have articles and the English 'the guy' carries with it connotations of definitiveness which are not there in the Polish original.

In some contrast, however, extract (10) is more interesting. The speaker begins by referring to the case of his dad, yet, immediately shifts to impersonal forms which we translated as 'you' and '~~one~~<sup>5</sup>one'<sup>6</sup>. It is noteworthy, that the distancing

strategy in the last fragment is interlinked with the informant's casting of what happened as something not unusual. His reference to others committing suicide positions his father's suicide not as unique, and through this perhaps understandable.

### Agentivity Agency

The final distancing strategy consists in diluting the father's responsibility for the act.

Here we are interested in speakers' positioning of their fathers in terms linguistic agency. That is to say, we wanted to see how 'doing things' is represented in discourse, paying attention especially to whether the father is positioned as doing which kind of actions. Our focus lay predominantly on the lexicogrammatical form, rather than on the contents of what was written. In other words, it was more important to us whether the linguistic form renders the 'doer' as doing things. This analysis was informed particularly by the linguistics of Halliday (1994) who sees it in terms of the linguistically represented participant and the process, i.e. who was involved in a particular action. This is because we were mindful of the fact that the linguistic agent might not necessarily be the 'sociological' one (van Leeuwen, 2008), that is to say as one who is taken to be an agent in a particular social context. We are ~~interested~~ interested only how fatherly suicide is constructed linguistically..

This was by far the most frequently used strategy. Although we do not have a clear explanation of the fact, we think, this might be to do with its plausibility. After all, regardless of the distancing strategies, it is clear who was the person that completed suicide and that what he did was take his own life. he completed suicide. It is perhaps less clear to what extent the person who completed suicide was an unfettered agent in the act. Constructing the informants' fathers as in one way or

another unwilling or forced to complete the act is a strategy which might have been perceived as having more chance of success. Moreover, what is crucial here is that we have found no stories in which the suicide was positioned as someone who simply did it. The informants used a number of strategies avoiding saying that their father 'killed himself' or 'committed suicide'. Instead they constructed the father as someone who completed suicide as not entirely aware of what he did, not entirely in possession of his mental faculties, or simply led to it by external forces. Let us start with the most clear of the examples we have:

(11) interviewee 4, woman

MDI: what changed after that moment. 'cause I asked you what your life had looked like after that event, what does it look like now? what has changed?

ID: family relationships. so nothing has changed because we all have been aware the whole time. as I have stressed it a number of times. that it is an illness and one simply suffering from such an illness certainly does not fully realise what he is doing.

(11) badany 4, kobieta

MD: a co twoim zdaniem zmieniło się po tamtej chwili bo y: pytałam cię o to jak jak wyglądało wasze życie po tamtym wydarzeniu jak teraz wygląda. a co się zmieniło?

I: no relacje w rodzinie. no nic się nie zmieniło bo my wszyscy sobie zdajemy cały czas z tego sprawę że tak jak już ileś razy podkreślałam że to jest choroba no i człowiek po prostu chorując na taką chorobę na pewno nie zdaje sobie sprawy do końca z tego co co co robi.

(12) interviewee 2, man

MDI: why do you think it happened?

IS: he fell into alcoholism. this is primarily, I think, the main reason for that suicide. the excess of alcohol, not managing his problems. failures in life. professional. divorce from my mother. loneliness. and alcohol. and that's enough to fall into some depression-? then the depression, it's obviously what it leads to. [...] and finally I have to say that he fell into alcoholism. and I'll say that all in all it was alcohol that controlled him and alcohol made him do what he did.

(12) badany 2, mężczyzna

MD: dlaczego tak/ dlaczego ojciec popełnił samobójstwo?

I: popadł w alkoholizm. to jest przede wszystkim myślę główna przyczyna powodu tego tego samobójstwa. nadmiar alkoholu nieporadzenie sobie z własnymi problemami. y: co niepowodzenia życiowe. zawodowe. rozwód z matką. y samotność. i alkohol. i to wystarczy do tego żeby gdzieś tam popada się w jakąś depresję prawda później depresja wiadomo do czego prowadzi.[...] aż w końcu no muszę tak powiedzieć że popadł w alkoholizm. I powiem że to w sumie alkohol nim kierował i alkohol skłonił do tego co zrobił.

The construction of the father who completed suicide in (11), a response to the question of the reasons why he completed suicide, as one who did not know what he was doing is made explicitly. Moreover, this construction is reinforced by re-positioning of the unique act as something 'one does'. The use of Polish *człowiek* (lit.:

‘man’), which we have already commented on above, suggests that the state of mind the informant’s father was commonly results in not knowing what a person does. What is notable in (12) is the use of nominalisations, that is to say rendering an action as an object. And so, the speaker speaks of his father in terms ‘lack of management’, ‘misfortune’, loneliness, together with ‘excess of alcohol’. There is nothing that the informant’s father ‘did’ that might have led to his suicide. The only linguistic action that is predicated of the father is his falling into depression, admittedly a very weak agency. The extract ends, on the other hand, with a very clear ascription of agency to alcohol which is represented as directing the father. He is constructed as a recipient of alcohol’s actions and cannot be seen as an agent in taking his life. These constructions were quite typical in our corpus.

Consider now another two extracts:

(13) interviewee 7, woman

ID: [...] they cannot face up, unfortunately life is not easy and sometimes we face unpleasant situations so such an escape from responsibility, certainly mental illnesses lead to such a decision. well, it’s certainly hard to understand and explain it to yourself. on dad’s example it seems to me that it was such an escape. fear.

(13) badany 7, kobieta

I: [...] nie potrafią stawić czoła niestety życie nie jest łatwe a nieraz spotykają nas przykre sytuacje więc taka ucieczka od odpowiedzialności na pewno te choroby psychiczne które y: prowadzą do podjęcia takiej decyzji. no na pewno ciężko zrozumieć i wytłumaczyć sobie to ja na przykładzie taty wydaje mi się że to była taka ucieczka. strach.

(14) interviewee 10, man

MD: why do you think it happened?

IS: why did my dad commit suicide, right? I mean, it seems to me that it was a matter of his current situation. that situation. I met him then and he was then, one can say, in a bad state of mind. that situation was more about to his mental state than other things. he was very much concerned with the kind of things which, objectively looking, probably were not significant.

(14) badany 10, mężczyzna

MD: a jak myślisz dlaczego tak się stało?

I: dlaczego y: mój tato popełnił samobójstwo tak? znaczy mi się wydaje że to była kwestia y: jego obecnej sytuacji. (niezrozumiałe) tamtej sytuacji hy: go właśnie wtedy spotkałem hy: i: on wtedy był można powiedzieć w takim kiepskim stanie psychicznym ta ta sytuacja bardziej dotyczyła jego stanu psychicznego niż y: właśnie innych rzeczy. on bardzo bardzo mocno się przejmował takimi sprawami które które obiektywnie na to patrząc chyba nie były istotne.

The informant in (13) again prefers talking about things, rather than actions. Interestingly, as he speaks of escape, he represents it not as associated with the father, it is just an escape. Although the association is realised by the use of ‘on dad’s example’, still, linguistically, the speaker never actually speaks of his father’s escape, let alone about the action of escaping. As previously, also here the only agent in the extract is the mental illness that directs the father to complete suicide. Extract (14) is different in that the speaker begins his account with interpreting the interviewer’s



question and does it by ascribing the suicide to his father explicitly and in agentive terms. Although relegated to the presupposition (a statement which is assumed by what is said), the question leaves no doubt that the father completed suicide. And yet, after this introduction the agentivity completely disappears. Once again, the informant reverts to speaking of situations, poor mental condition. The only agency that is ascribed the father is worrying too much.

We would like to finish the section with one final extract:

(15) interviewee 5, man

**IS:** [...] I guess I'm talking about myself because I was deeply hurt. why did do it? he was not seventy, he was forty-something. he could have lived who knows how long and he left us all. he left me as his, son he left his daughters, those he wanted so much, he left them at fate's mercy. I think it's just that the psyche gives in, or you are simply too weak to fight with. that's what I think, I do not know.

(15) badany 5, mężczyzna

I: [...] tak mi się wydaje ja mówię o sobie bo ja miałem potworny żal. dlaczego on to zrobił? nie miał siedemdziesięciu lat miał czterdzieści parę. mógł żyć jeszcze nie wiadomo jak długo i zostawił zostawił nas wszystkich. y zostawił mnie jako syna zostawił dw: zostawił córki te które tak bardzo chciał zostawił na pastwę losu. myślę że to po prostu gdzieś ta psychika jest siada u kogoś i albo jest osobą po prostu zbyt słabą żeby z nią walczyć. tak mi się wydaje nie wiem.

There is so much agentivity ascribed to the father. Very explicitly the informant says that his father did it, left him, left his two daughters, left them to their own devices. But then there is a shift and the agentivity disappears and once again the suicide is backgrounded and the speaker starts speaking of situations or a psyche. Quite extraordinarily, this extract and the others above show that the stories of fatherly suicide do not contain direct references to the father's committing it. The action is changed into an object and the father is never represented as actually 'doing' it. The third distancing strategy completes the picture – fatherly suicide is not something one speaks of directly.

## Conclusions

In our article we take the issue of what might be called 'discourse of fatherly suicide'. Founded by a conflict between two social metanarratives: stigmatising suicide and strong fatherhood, we argue that it is underpinned by ambiguity. This ambiguity is realised by three distancing strategies, those that make the act, the person, and his agency unclear. To our best knowledge our article is the first that tackles such stories.

But before we go on, there is a reservation to be made here. The question we would like to raise<sup>7</sup> is whether the stories we analyse here are indeed those of 'fatherly suicide' or perhaps they are stories of fatherly untimely/sudden death. Without further research we cannot offer an answer with a high level of certainty. However, we would speculate that the stories we collected, did not only focus on the father's untimely death. It was also the 'nature' of the death (suicide) as well as, importantly, the father's agency that was distanced from. This might suggest that the

~~stories were indeed constitutive~~beconstitutive of a discourse of ~~fatherly~~fatherly suicide, and not only ~~fatherly~~fatherly death.

~~As we indicated earlier, we are not aware of any research considering children's narratives of their fathers' suicidal death. We see it as having a number of potential consequences. The first is a further understanding of the dominant model of fatherhood and masculinity. Just as for men with a diagnosis of depression (Galasiński, 2008), it also seems to be the main frame of reference in which also to see the father who killed himself.~~

~~Now, Before before we offer some concluding remarks, we would like to~~Let us offer ~~here~~ one final extract, a fuller version of one which we quoted earlier:

(16) interviewee 6, woman

MDI: and now, who is your dad for you, in retrospect?

ID: he is the guardian angel who looks at me and who is always close to me in my heart, nothing has changed. I love him so much and now even more. I know that he didn't do it, because certainly he didn't want to do it, he didn't want to hurt anyone. I realize that our psyche somehow also controlled him that he had did such a, because it is huge, one needs to be more strong in order to take such a step. and I don't blame him at all, apparently it had to be that way, that's how I explain it to myself. but he is still my dad and have pictures. I watch movies and obviously I remember various situations, and I shed a tear. but he is part of our life and we don't forget him, we talk and reminisce but about the nice things. one doesn't remember the illness.

(16) badany 6, kobieta

MD: a kim teraz z perspektywy czasu jest dla ciebie tato?

I: jest aniołem stróżem y który patrzy na mnie i który zawsze jest blisko mnie w moim sercu y: nic się nie zmieniło. kocham go tak samo nawet bardziej. wiem że y: nie zrobił to dlatego że na pewno nie chciał tego zrobić nie chciał nikogo skrzywdzić. y: zdaje sobie sprawę że nasza psychika gdzieś sterowała też nim że popełnił takie bo to jest to jest ogromne y: ktoś musi być bardziej silny żeby żeby zdecydować się na taki krok i y: nie winię go absolutnie za to po prostu no/ tak widocznie musiało być w ten sposób to sobie tłumaczę. ale ale jest dalej moim tatą i mam zdjęcia. oglądam filmy wiadomo że przypominają mi się różne sytuacje gdzieś tam się leżkę uroni. ale jest jest częścią naszego życia i i nie zapominamy o nim dużo mówimy wspominamy jakieś tam miłe chwile raczej raczej te miłe. o tej chorobie się nie pamięta.

We quote this extract again as we want to show again the constructed ambivalence of the fatherly suicide. There is no doubt, first of all, that the informant constructs his father in very positive terms, representing him mostly through the relationships he and others still have with him. But then, the father has completed suicide, an act which is constructed in negative terms, even though it is never referred to explicitly. Not only is the suicide something which can hurt others, but also it is something one can be blamed for. And yet, this negativity is mitigated. It starts with the strategy we have already discussed – also here the informant constructs his father as being controlled by his ‘psyche’. But the extract goes further. The speaker not only does not blame his father for the suicide, but in fact turns thea person who commits it into someone strong. A suicide becomes an act which requires courage – much in line with the socially sanctioned image of fatherhood. All in all, the conflict between the suicide and father must be won by the father.

Now, we see the positivity of the representations of these representations as anchored in the dominant model of masculinity and fatherhood (Zoja, 2001; Galasiński, 2013), constructing the father in terms of strength and success. It is particularly surprising, however, because of the father is quite surprising particularly in the context of much research indicating difficulties associated with the process of bereavement and coping after the suicidal death of a parent. Children are described as vulnerable to long-term maladaptive outcomes of parental suicide death because of a number of factors like developmental tasks, surviving parent's caregiving ability, social stigma or the process of communication about the death (e.g. Jordan, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2006; Pfeffer et al., 1997; Pfeffer et al., 2000; Sveen and Walby, 2008). Importantly, the loss of a parent influences the child's personality, identity and world-view, and, as researchers (e.g. Oltjenbruns, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1996) suggest, children's grief never ends.

Indeed, also our informants talked about significant difficulties resulting from their fathers' suicide. Negative changes in the family's socio-economic conditions, shame, social exclusion, change of domicile and other were identified. Despite that they consistently constructed a positive image of their father, sheltered from the negativity of the suicide. This consistently made us reflect on the role of such constructions, as we assumed it was not pretended or resulting from the cultural directive not to speak ill of the dead. Still, despite their own narrative reflection of what happened to them, our informants retained strong fatherhood as the frame of reference in which they constructed their fathers.

Now, there ~~There~~ is also no research on sources of the narrated image of the father (and, indeed, the parent in general) who died through suicide. We have only found claims that the ways in which children define the memory of the deceased may

be associated with levels of adaptation and coping also in adulthood (e.g. Dorpat, 1972; Warren, 1972). One can wonder therefore, to what extent research such as ours, focusing on the discursive form (in contrast to one using standardised psychological instruments) can be seen as pertinent in the assessment of children's coping with the loss (see our earlier research on insight and the use of discursive form in the assessment thereof; Galasiński 2010). To what extent, moreover, is the positive representation of the father associated with a positive end of bereavement? What are the sources of such representations? A study carried out by Wood, Byram, Gosling and Stokes (2012) might indicate that such constructions are not typical. The researchers examined children's and adolescents' 'continuing bond' with the parent and suggest a much weaker bond than one which would be suggested by our research.

The discrepancy between our findings and the findings presented by Wood and colleagues (2012) needs to be investigated, as it might suggest that differences in methodology result in a different description of people's experiences. It might also, however, indicated the need for a more significant anchoring of the research in its social underpinnings. In other words, again, The-the positivity of the father's image in the stories of fatherly suicide, also might also indicates the endurance of the traditional (and stereotypical) role of the father in society. Despite common by now rejections of the strong father role as not only unique, but perhaps even dominant, which can be found in the social scientific literature, paradoxically, our research suggests that in traumatic and extreme situations such a role might still be a source of comfort.

All-in-allIn conclusion, we think of our research as opening new research spaces particularly in the hitherto undervalued qualitative explorations of suicide experience. The strength of such research lies in offering insight into the lived

experience of suicide of a father as rendered by the narratives of those involved. We offer a contribution to a still-to-small a corpus of research showing suicide from the micro-perspective of a story.

## Notes

1. As a way of destigmatising suicide and avoid connotations of criminality, we follow recommendations to speak of ‘completing’ rather than ‘committing suicide’. We left ‘commit’ only the cases where our informants used it.
2. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Wroclaw Faculty of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland.

3. Finally, we have chosen to represent our informants with a uniform ‘I’ (for interviewee), rather than fictional first names as often is the practice in the literature or fictional initials. The interviewer is referred to by her actual initials (MD). This is for two reasons. First, the interviewer was not on first name basis with the informants (the default address form for adults in Polish is the polite form *pan/pani*, the equivalent of German *Sie* or Spanish *Usted*), also because we have an impression that referring to informants, adult people, only by first names (fictional or not) is, especially in the Polish context, slightly patronising and to a certain extent at least puts them in a position of lower or inferior status. Second, fictitious initials might actually give false appearances as to people’s identities. Thus, in order to protect the privacy of ~~the~~ our informants we have decided to anonymise their stories and identities completely.

3.4. The English ‘authority’ is ambiguous as regards translation into Polish. In the particular context the informants used the word *autorytet*, a noun referring to someone whose knowledge, experience etc. is worth following. It always has positive connotations.

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~~4.5.~~ The original contains Polish *wiadomo* whose closest translation should be rendered as ‘it is known’, which is quite cumbersome. We have decided to use ‘obviously’ as a functional equivalent.

~~6.~~ The speaker uses Polish ‘człowiek’.

~~5.7.~~ We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing our attention to the problem.

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